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Kephart Letters (6)

Horace Kephart (1862-1931) was a renowned author and librarian who changed the course of his urban life to pursue his true passion recording the intricacies of the Southern Appalachian wilderness and its people. In addition to many published articles spanning ten years of his outdoor experiences, Kephart published two major works; *Our Southern Highlanders* and *Camping and Woodcraft* are two books that still remain relevant and influential today and highlight Kephart's skill of intertwining autobiographical information with historical and cultural study ("Hunter Library Special Collections"). Not only is he celebrated for his dedication to presenting a genuine portrait of the people of Southern Appalachia, but also for his dedication to preserving the wilderness which he loved so much. His active role in advocating for the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park reflects such care for the people and region about which he wrote, and the peak named in his honor serves as an appropriate memorial (Ellison ix-xlvi).

According to biographer George Ellison, Kephart's life can be divided into three separate parts: his years in the Northeast where he worked as a librarian and was a devoted family man, his years of seclusion living in the Great Smoky Mountains, and his settled, secure years as a well-known writer in Bryson City. The following letter written to Horace Kephart in 1919 falls in the final part of his journey. In order to understand the details of the letter, one must be familiar with the fact that hunting was one of Kephart's many outdoor hobbies. At one point

during his first career, he became so immersed in his outdoor hobbies that he simply stopped publishing articles on librarianship and “thereafter wrote exclusively on outdoor life, firearms, and American history” (Ellison *xxiii*). It seems these interests combined led Kephart to become a collector of firearms.

The following transcribed and edited letter was written by Marc Woodmansee of Iowa who was an acquaintance of Kephart and manager of the Standard Oil Company at the time the letter was written (“United States”). In it, Woodmansee is chiefly concerned with the discussion of the collection and purchase of antique firearms. According to a 1919 article in *The Saturday Evening Post* titled “Out-of-Doors,” Marc Woodmansee is described as “quite possibly the leading collector of Kentucky rifles in the country” (101). In his letter to Kephart, Woodmansee references his interest in the “Kentucks” several times. Based on the detailed information he gives Kephart about the prices of such firearms as well as the sales catalogues and specific collections, one can infer that Kephart was also an avid collector. This is also the case for the two other men mentioned in the letter. Part of what Woodmansee is trying to do in the letter is to set up a meeting between a Mr. Harmer and Kephart. Harry B. Harmer of Philadelphia, a salesman in the leather industry, was also a well-known firearms collector (“United States”). His collection is referenced in an issue of the *American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletins* about revolving rifles from 1961 where he is called “the Dean of early collectors” (Stewart). The last man mentioned in the letter appears to be the most famous firearms collector compared to Kephart, Woodmansee, and Harmer. He is referred to as Chas Schott. In fact, the collection Woodmansee refers to that went to auction is that of Charles M. Schott, Jr. of New York. His collection of mostly rare models of pistols was given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art after his death. According to the Museum’s 1919 bulletin about recent accessions Schott was “a close student on

a particular type of pistol, known as the ‘detonator,’ which supplanted the ‘flintlock’ and which in turn was superseded by the ‘percussion lock’” (94). Therefore, while Woodmansee’s tone is friendly and casual, this aim of the letter is not simply to plan an outdoor trip. It is clear that the significant content which he wishes to convey is about fellow firearms collectors and how to build a worthy collection. This letter would be of particular importance to anyone interested in the study or collection of antique fire arms, as important collectors, and specific prices and types of firearms are mentioned.

Editorial Practices

The manuscript of the following letter was originally written as a one letter that spanned five separate pages of writing. For the sake of readability, I have transcribed the five separate pages as one cohesive letter. The manuscript was written on letterhead from the Standard Oil Company the look of which I have copied almost exactly (aside from capitalization) on only the first page of the transcribed letter. However, the original five page letter had the Standard Oil Company letterhead on each page. Indentation and words that were hyphenated due to line breaks have also been amended in order to make the letter more accessible to the reader. Due to the number of times one encounters monetary amounts, I have chosen to write these amounts the same way each time, whereas Woodmansee was not consistent in always including a dollar and/or cent amount.

Woodmansee’s handwriting idiosyncrasies posed significant problems determining matters of punctuation and capitalization. It is nearly impossible to distinguish between the marks he uses for periods and commas. Therefore, there were instances where I simply had to make a choice between a period or a comma based on where a capital letter next occurred

signaling a new sentence or where a comma most likely would have been used due to standard grammar rules. I also decided to amend what often seemed to be arbitrary capitalization because I thought it was more important for the reader to see standard capitalization practices.

Although the aforementioned changes may seem plentiful, I did decide that it was not necessary to change spelling errors or grammar errors such as fragments or missing apostrophes because such mistakes reflect the speed with which handwritten letters were composed, colloquialisms of the time, and the casual tone of this letter from one friend to another. This also means there are instances of missing words that I did not change. The one change I did make was again related to readability. There was one instance where Woodmansee forgot a word and inserted it above a line with a caret symbol. Instead of noting this within the transcription, I simply added the word into the sentence, as it was his original intention to do so. However, all other mistakes pertaining to spelling and grammar are consistent with the original manuscript. Therefore, my main areas of focus while editing the letter were maintaining the voice of Marc Woodmansee while also making the letter as accessible to the reader as possible. My intention was to strike a balance between these two areas of focus.

STANDARD OIL COMPANY¹
(Indiana)
Sales Department

Department Correspondence

Des Moines Branch
And Associates

Des Moines, IA., Feb 28-19

M. Storer, Manager
Amos Ball, Asst. Manager

In Your Reply Refer to File No.

Dear Mr. Kephart,

I have your letter of Feb 10. And feel like writing. And in as much as I am unmarried, (I mean am a bachelor) I am generally permitted to do as I like, so long as I keep within the law, or at least keep the law from knowing. So I feel like writing to you, but this does not mean that I should expect you to take valuable time to respond to every out burst of mine. There are two things which I really do want you to try and arrange to do, that is make me a visit sometime. The other is to visit Mr. Harmer.²

I want you see the "*Kentucks*."³ The "Royal family" if I may be permitted to use a European term.

And should you ever feel that you could and would like to make a canoe cruise of Missouri or Mississippi river: or even a Minnesota lake or Canadian trip. Will be pleased to put my canoe equipment at your disposal, and I assure you it is complete – I am enclosing part of letter from Harmer. I want you to know him. He is one of the finest men I have ever known. And of the sort one likes even when they know him well enough to know their faults. And take it from me, this sort is all too scarce. You will note he makes mention of the death of Chas M Schott.⁴ He was one of the real fire arms collectors and last fall his collection was sold at auction in New York. I have the priced catalogue of this sale. It book about \$20,000. And if you would care for a copy, why, you'll be more than welcome to it. Their sales catalogues are not only a source of information in regard to discipline of different types, but are a guide to what price they are actually commanding. I have priced catalogues of practically every fire arm sale of note that

¹ Standard Oil Company and Trust was an "American company and corporate trust that from 1870 to 1911 was the industrial empire of John D. Rockefeller and associates, controlling almost all oil production, processing, marketing, and transportation in the United States" ("Standard Oil Company").

² According the U.S. Census Bureau, Harry B. Harmer (1858-1931) of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was known as a significant early gun collector (Stewart).

³ Short for the Kentucky rifle. It is often found within quotation marks because the identification of this rifle with the state of Kentucky is incorrect, as it has more ties to Pennsylvania. However, due to the influence of a song about the Battle of New Orleans in 1812 which references the "Kentucky," that is still how it is referred to today (Wilkinson).

⁴ Charles M. Schott, Jr. of New York was a collector of ancient firearms. He gave his collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art after his death where it was then on exhibition in 1919 ("Recent Accessions").

has been held in New York or Boston since 1910. And have marked the steadily increasing price they bring – and this is especially true of the rare ones.

And in this connection, anything you chance to run onto anything in the fire arms that you'd like to know what it would command in cash, why, ask me. I'll be only to glad to look it up for you. And it sometimes pays to know. For instance, last fall I dropped into a second hand store, saw a Colt "Dragoon" premium revolver,⁵ (cut for shoulder slick) worth at least \$50.00. Ones not cut for shoulder slick are worth \$25.00 to \$35.00. The store man said I know that these old civil war cap-ball revolvers⁶ are not worth over \$2.00, but this one was left for me to sell at \$4.00, so thats the price. And where do you suppose it is now. Sure, you've guessed it. In Harmers collection, attached to a shoulder slick which he had on hand for several years, just waiting for the "gun" part. He now has a pair. I was out \$4.00 cash. This because I saw fit to present it to him, but then there is a fine "Kentuck" at home, which came from the Quaker City,⁷ and with no consideration (primary) attached. There is only one way for a friend of Harmers to keep a head of him in the way of good terms, and that will be to be of service to him, and then die before he could return the compliment and then he do like he did with Chas Schott, go and help "tote" his remains to the graveyard.

By the way, you'll probably not understand part of his letter. So will explain. He gets a lot of good out of roasting me in a good natured way. For instance, I like whiskey just about as well as I would like kerosene. And when I do occasionally like a drink for manners sake, I want something soothing to cool my throat. On the other hand Harmer is a connoisseur of what is regarded as good whiskey, and can drink it like you could drink coffee, and I've seen him drink enough in one day to paralyze me for a week, and it had no apparent effect upon him. The effect will come sooner or later but that is another story.

Hell, I've taken up enough of your time, so will bring this to a close.

And remember that the "latch string"⁸ is out at my home. And my good mother will see that you get enough to eat. And I'll tell you enough about the old rifle kings to fill a small book.

Very Sincerely Yours

Marc Woodmansee

⁵ Also referred to as a Holster Pistol, this revolver was produced by Samuel Colt and Eli Whitney in 1847 (Wilkinson).

⁶ Although not the earliest revolver, this type of revolver patented by Samuel Colt was the first of its kind: "Where earlier revolvers required the shooter to line up a chamber with the barrel and cock the hammer in separate steps, Colt devised a single-action mechanical linkage that rotated the cylinder as the hammer was cocked with the thumb" ("Pistols").

⁷ Nickname for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania derived from founder William Penn's Quaker background (Werner).

⁸ Idiom used during this time period. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the idiom can be found dating as far back as 1893 as a common expression of hospitality.

Annotated Bibliography

Ellison, George. Introduction. *Our Southern Highlanders: A Narrative of Adventure in the Southern Appalachians and a Study of Life among the Mountaineers*. By Horace Kephart. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1976. ix-xlvi. Print.

Ellison's introduction provides context for the reason Kephart's book became so widely read and highly valued. It highlights the historical, autobiographical, and even sociological nature of the famous book about the Southern mountains and its people.

Encyclopedia Britannica Editors. "Pistols." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 2015. Web. 2 Dec. 2015.

This global digital media company has far surpassed the print editions of the past. With its promise of trustworthy, relevant, and timely information, it is an excellent reference source of factual information that is constantly being updated and checked by scholars and editors.

---. "Standard Oil Company and Trust." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 2015. Web. 1 Dec. 2015.

See above for annotation.

Hunter Library Special Collections and Mountain Heritage Center. "Horace Kephart Biography." *Horace Kephart, Revealing an Enigma*. Western Carolina University, 2005. Web. 28 Nov. 2015.

Hosted by Western Carolina University's Special Collections at Hunter Library in conjunction with The Mountain Heritage Center, this online exhibit includes documents and artifacts concerning Horace Kephart's life and works. Such documents and artifacts include his writings, photographs, personal letters, and maps.

"latch-string, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, 2015. Web. 1 Dec 2015.

This historical dictionary is the accepted authority on the English language. Rather than a simple definition of a word, one can use this source to discover not only meaning and pronunciation but also etymology. It is also possible to search through millions of quotations making it possible to find the usage of phrases as well.

"Out-of-Doors." *The Saturday Evening Post* 2 Aug. 1919: 101+. Web. *Google books*. 2 Dec. 2015.

This weekly magazine was first published in Philadelphia and its focus was considered American general interest. Its publication spanned the 19th and 20th centuries. Many issues of this magazine are available digitally through databases such as ProQuest and Academic Search Complete. However, the issue from the year used above was only available through Google books.

“Recent Accessions.” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 14.4 (1919): 94. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 Dec. 2015.

With coverage spanning from 1905-2011, this quarterly publication focuses on exhibitions and collections of the Museum and is geared toward a general audience.

Stewart, Henry M. Jr. “Revolving Rifles.” *The American Society of Arms Collectors*. The American Society of Arms Collectors, 2013. Web. 2 Dec. 2015.

Founded in 1953, membership for this national organization is by invitation only and is limited to 250 people. Its focus as stated on the homepage of the website is on “the collection, research, study, and preservation of arms, armor, and accessories and accoutrements; to establish and promote standards and ethics in research and dissemination of information pertaining to the history of arms and armor; and to promote and further the preparation, publication and distribution of scholarly literature pertaining to the development and history of arms and armor.”

Werner, Emma J. Lapsanky. “Quaker City.” *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*. Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia, 2015. Web. 2 Dec. 2015.

Based on the work of leading and emerging scholars, this project began as an attempt to increase civic engagement by providing more information about one of America’s oldest cities. One can search the website by contents, themes, maps, timeline, artifacts, blogs, and sources. The project is produced by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities at Rutgers-Camden.

Wilkinson, Frederick . *Antique Firearms*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1969. Print.

Geared towards active firearms collectors as well as students wishing to learn about the history firearms, this comprehensive book traces the history of the firearm from the 14th century to the modern repeating rifle. Its table of contents traces the history of firearms by grouping the firearms chronologically. It also contains an extensive index and bibliography.

United States. Department of Commerce. Census Bureau. *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920*. *Ancestry.com*. 2010. Web. 28 Nov. 2015.

The Ancestry Library Edition is a research tool specifically focused on genealogy. It allows one to find accurate historical information by searching through government records such as birth and death certificates, Census, military records, and so on.